

Where is the soap dish? (Or why UX is important.)

Several weeks ago, I told you all about the awful experience that passes itself off as the Holiday Inn Express. One of the smaller, yet super annoying, things wrong there was the fact that in the (cramped) bathroom, there was no soap dish. A stand holding the usual hotel toiletries, including soap bars, was cluttering the minimal counter space, but there was no place to put the soap once you opened the plastic wrapping. The soap kept sliding to the floor after I washed my hands.



Soap by Radio.Guy on Flickr

Just a few weeks before my stay at the HIE, I stayed at a boutique inn in the same city. Among the many amenities was a soap dish in the bathroom. It was a nice touch. It showed the inn had considered the guest's needs (and that someone somewhere had actually used soap to wash their hands at some point, which apparently the managers at the HIE never had done).

It's really very simple: You have to consider people's needs and how they do things. Providing a great hotel experience OR

an effective website **DEPENDS** on whether you are considering your end user (your guest, your audience). How does a person use your product? What does a person need to navigate your site?

Have you ever been to a website where you can't find what you are looking for? I bet you have! Those websites are generally cluttered with tons of information that is not organized for the user but rather for the idiosyncrasies of the various organizational departments (Sales & Promotion says we need to include this, Legal says we have to include that).

The other day I was looking for a blog on an organizational website and I didn't see it where you would normally. I figured it did not exist. I was wrong. It was under "publications." Why? Because the Publications Department is in charge of the blog. Publications clearly doesn't understand website visitors. Those visitors aren't familiar with (nor do they care about) your organizational hierarchy!

This is where user experience or UX comes in. UX specialists are there to make your website friendly to visitors. If a visitor wants to find your calendar of events, he or she will find it easily instead of clicking through various places. There are ways to make website navigation easy and sensible.

Perhaps you are a small organization that can't afford to hire a usability expert to assess and fix your website. Just think about the soap dish. Do you have what your visitors need? Where would they easily find it?

If you fail to think about how people actually use your product or service, then you will fail to serve their needs.